



"Where is he?" I asked, trying to get a peep at my assassin through the weeds.—Page 697.

MASQUERADE ISLAND

By Georgia Wood Pangborn

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HOWARD GILES

I WAS alone out on the Point trying to think what I was going to do with Grace Airley now I'd got her, for she had been telling me how we were to spend our honeymoon, and about the castles we were to buy, and had ended by touching me for her bridge debts; so I was thinking maybe I'd have to go to work, after all, when I looked out to sea just in time to see the dear old *Drusilla* rounding the Point.

But I had no more than said, "Well, I'll be damned!" to the *Drusilla's* heels than I heard a woman scream out my name, and, turning quickly, saw little Polly Beeson, one of the Airley maids. What had

scared her was more than I could guess, for there was never a soul in sight but herself and me; but she fainted dead away before I could ask her what was the matter. By the time I had got to her she had opened her eyes and raised up on one elbow.

"Drop in the grass! Then work your way over the bluff—under the roots that hang over. Get up under them—dig down into the sand and cover yourself with it—" Then she began to cry.

I said, "Whatever *is* the row?" and stood still, looking down at her. She struck at me like a cat for my slowness.

"I tell you, get *down*! There'll be time enough to talk when you're hidden."

I searched my conscience for anybody who had reason to hate me. I couldn't think of any one, but I dropped: "Where is he?" I asked, trying to get a peep at my assassin through the weeds, but she only shook her head impatiently, motioning me to be quiet.

"You'll have to stay here all night," she announced presently. "I'll try to get food to you, and we may be able to plan something." But her tone was not hopeful. "And, mind you, *keep down!* Once you're found I can't do anything more."

She rose and without another look at me started back along the beach. I looked out to sea, and saw the *Drusilla* again, hull down this time, going into a pink and gold sunset. She and the sun dropped together, and then I heard the cheering. Like a baseball field in the distance—just exactly.

I lifted my head above the fringe of grass where Polly had left me, and the land side of all those big cottages of ours, that had been solemnly boarded up for the winter that afternoon, was blazing with light, the windows shining as if it were the height of the season.

So *that* was it! Our incomparable Islanders, fisher-folk trained for twenty years as maids and butlers, were in the habit of skylarking with the property left in their care. Polly's horror had prepared me for a more dignified complication than that. Why, I wouldn't tell on them! I would merely stroll down there among them, jolly them a little, tip like a giant, and grin like the quality of mercy.

But when the cheering stopped and the surf was the only noise left, I began to hear—the merest insect thread of sound—a *voice*. At that distance it must have been an extraordinary one to sound so clearly. It kept up for an hour.

I couldn't distinguish a word, of course, but it made me think, that voice, of how Captain Kidd and his crew are said to have meddled with our Islanders' ancestry somewhere back, and I wondered how it would have sounded bawling orders against a gale. I meekly crouched down as Polly had ordered while a strong sea-wind set in, blowing the sand in my face and stirring up a choppy blackness between me and my own world—a blackness that was presently shot with drifts of

white of all sizes, from elephants to sheep and doves, doing a devil's dance to the sky-line.

I was cold and hungry. As it seemed impenetrably dark, I got up at last to walk up and down, stamping to keep warm. Pirates? It had not occurred to me before that our agreeable and useful Islanders were different from any other of those human appliances we engage to take most of the details of living off our hands. But now the thread of that mighty voice persisted in my ear like a mosquito. Captain Kidd? My startled mind reviewed the incidents which had made us decide to recruit our Island servants wholly from the natives. Twenty years ago that decision had been reached, after a series of casualties—drownings, falling from cliffs, a suicide or two—until we were like to have been without any service at all, for not a man Jack would come with us from the mainland. Then old Beeson had appeared from nowhere in particular, and after that there had been no more trouble—none at all. It had been a service of oil and honey. The whole colony of us shut up the Island in the fall and went away, and in the spring came back to it to find everything as we had left it, polished, shining, and oiled, an uncrumpled rose-leaf, ointment without a fly.

But now their faces—that dark, hawk-like Island type—began to start out at me like objects in a fog. Once I had squarely met the eyes of that old patriarch Beeson, the Airley butler. I had been having a little collision with a maid and a tray. He happened in as the mess was being wiped up, and—the look he gave me! It smoothed out directly the maid spoke, and yet there was something about it that lingered tinglingly. Beeson wasn't the hawk type; he was smooth and pale and bland, like—and a cool sensation trickled down my spine—like Long John Silver. I had fully decided that he was the orator of the evening; yet thinking of Devries, the club barber, whose profile was like Savonarola, I reserved a suspicion of him also. That bleak sea-wind helped my fancy to dress up both old rascals with handkerchiefs around their heads, rings in their ears, and sashes stuck full of cutlasses and pistols, and set them to pacing quarter-decks, having burst out

of their smug livery like chickens out of shells. I was falling into a drowsy nightmare about keelhauling, when there was a rustle not made by the wind, and little Polly Beeson came up in a gray dress that was invisible against the sand and made a ghost of her.

"I've brought you some food, but you mustn't stop to eat it now. Hurry! Come down to the beach. *Don't* stand up against the sky-line!"

"The tide will cover our steps," she panted. It was already coming in, and she ran so close to the water that her feet splashed in it now and then. And so for two miles we scurried like sandpipers, then up a sandy bluff to the deserted fisher-huts. She pushed open a door that swung on one hinge.

"You must get along without light or heat," said she, and with no more than that was gone again in the windy dark. A fog was riding in, and its tears hung thick on my white flannels. I gazed sorrowfully at the capable fireplace. Had not light and heat been taboo, I might have summoned up philosophy of a sort. As it was, I ate what Polly had brought gratefully, distinguishing cake from meat by touch and smell, then fubbed off my discomfort with a cigarette, seating myself on a whale's vertebra, which seemed intended to serve as a chair. And so, leaning my head upon my folded arms, I fell asleep.

When I woke there were voices outside the door and it was light.

"Polly, Polly!" a man was saying. "Who's the stowaway this time, Polly?"

As she made no answer, he went on: "I don't think I can bear to see you cry, Polly. Maybe I'll help. Is it Watkins?"

"Oh, well!" came her answer at last, and the tears in it were plain, "he was out on the Point when the *Drusilla* sailed. I—well, I thought at first it was you, and was running to catch up, and then—I went all to pieces! I finally got him scared enough to hide. But, oh, why did they have to begin their noise before the patrol had been around? Twenty-four hours would have saved him."

"Perhaps some of us think twenty-four hours of liberty more important than the welfare of Mr. Watkins."

She gave a little wail of protest. "Welfare! But, Billy, this one isn't a bad

sort—really. Why, if one dispensed with all the people in the world that haven't anything the matter with them except general uselessness—He's not a Hathaway! *That* one—I'd never have interfered for Hathaway."

"I should say not!" He was silent for a space, then observed interestedly: "D'you know, I've sometimes wondered whether we shouldn't think better of these people if we saw them on the mainland. This is their playground. Now, when they go back, they—they work at something, don't they?" He spoke with the calm speculation of the ethnologist. He really did not know. Neither did Polly.

"I suppose they must," she agreed doubtfully; "but they don't talk about it—at least the women don't."

They seemed to give the subject a moment's silent wonder, then Billy said crisply: "Well, suppose we go in to the patient?"

The door opened and I saw that Billy was the big life-saver whose stunt was sitting around the bathing beach all summer and towing back the girls when they got to showing off too hard. But now, instead of being a splendid bronze statue in blue trunks, he was dressed like all the other Islanders when out of livery, in millionaire cast-offs, very tight across the shoulders and flappy around the waist. His red-bronze face—how did it happen that in all the many times I had seen the man I had never known what eyes he had? Meeting them now, full, my question that had been conceived with something of threatening dignity fell peevish and impudent. Nevertheless, I got it out:

"And what was it happened to Hathaway?" I asked.

"Went to Africa to hunt lions, didn't he?" answered Billy calmly. "Why, have you news of him?"

"I seemed to have, just now."

"Oh!" cried out Polly; "all my fault!" and turned away with her hands over her face.

Billy looked at me very intently.

"Did you know him well? Does any one over there"—he motioned seaward with his head—"want him back?" And as I hesitated what to answer: "Suppose we forget him, then."

I looked toward Polly, who was sobbing in a corner.

"Shall we forget him?" said Billy.

"For the present," I conceded.

"For all time, or Polly and I walk away and leave you to shift for yourself."

But I shirked the issue, and avoiding the brightness of his eyes let my glance travel critically about the deserted cabin, picking out the sagging door, the blight and mildew upon the poor furnishings.

"You don't seem to be using your own houses much," I remarked.

"Why should we?" he quietly retorted.

"We've stopped being fishermen, haven't we? And you've built up our moors and replaced our roses and yellow clover and huckleberries with formal gardens. Must we, then, stay out of your comfortable empty city and huddle all winter in our huts, worse off than our parents before you came? Men expect strange things of each other," said Billy Strait.

"I don't see any great objection to Box and Cox," said I, "if you vacate in time and don't injure things, but when it comes to putting witnesses out of the way, as you admit you did with Hathaway..."

Billy strolled over to the window, where Polly was keeping a lookout. "You'll soon be able to talk that over with some one who can answer you better than I," he threw over his shoulder.

But Polly, darting from the window, pushed me backward into a musty little closet, closing the door after me, while creatures disturbed by my entry scuttled into crevices.

"Give him more time!" I heard her plead. "It was all my fault. I could never be happy if that happened through me. Don't you see?"

"I see that you are wonderfully anxious about him."

"Why, Billy! you don't . . . you're never thinking I *care* for him!"

He did not answer at once. "For a moment I was puzzled," he said at length, "but I see. Of course. Kiss me, and then we'll talk to them."

Mingling with his words came the soft crunch of steps in the sand, and directly Polly's voice, pretending laughter: "Here we are, boys!"

"Hello, Polly! Well, well—and Billy, too! Back to the old sod!" came the reply with cheerful humor.

I gathered an impression that the room was crowded. There was a suppressed

moving about, a sound of breathing as if from ten or a dozen people.

"How long have you two been here?" The question was rasped out sharply, and at the same time something rubbed heavily against the door of my cupboard, as though a man were leaning there. In a panic lest the weak hinges should give way I softly placed my own shoulders as a counter brace, and there we stood, back to back, with only the rotting wood between us.

"Ten minutes—maybe half an hour. Why, Connie?" asked Polly tranquilly.

"Have you seen anything in our line?" The first voice broke in with some indignation. "Now, look here, who's in charge here anyway, and since when have we taken to bothering the girls about our business? There's nobody here but Billy and Polly. Get out! For'd *march!*"

Straightway the shoulders against which I had been so anxiously leaning were withdrawn, and had my recovery not been of the quickest I should have betrayed myself then and there by falling into the room. I heard them, as I thought, all go out, and there being no voice or movement for several minutes, concluded that Polly and Billy had accompanied them. Nevertheless I remained as I was, and I had not long to wait before there was once more a step in the sand—a man's step; Billy returning, no doubt. I drew a breath of relief. The step entered the doorway, making a gritty sound of wet sand ground between the rubber sole and the floor, crossed directly to my hiding-place, and the door was thrown wide.

"You may come out now, Mr. Watkins," said the sharp voice, and I looked into the hawk-face of young Devries. He was his father's assistant at the club. I had been shaved by him once, and when he had cut me most inexcusably I had expressed my mind with great freedom. I don't know whether he was remembering that incident as we faced each other there; but I was, vividly.

He covered me with a revolver.

"Oh, put it up!" said I, trying to assume an air of bored indifference. "I sha'n't try to fight a whole island full of lunatics."

He made no conversation as we started back along the beach. The fog was rolling seaward. A stormy sunlight touched

the water to flame for perhaps a mile, and beyond that it was a curtain of milk. In this open space the gulls were manoeuvring as thick as flies, and squawking like the devil's barn-yard. The tide was low, and the wet scallops lay scattered like purple and yellow pansies; a thick ridge of heavy seaweed was shot through with gleams of silver, the tiny bodies of a stranded school of little fish.

The fog suddenly fading for a mile or so more revealed the lines of a four-masted schooner perilously near the bar. Now, with the going of the fog, her sails were blossoming with panic swiftness, as she prepared to withdraw her foot from where it never should have been. Her sails were the only ones in all the ocean, it seemed. And strange enough it was to see the water empty of all our gay little craft. The emptiness of the beach was strange enough, too, and the silence. I missed the Casino band. But as I walked obediently shoulder to shoulder with my sinister companion I was thankful that the sun shone and that all was so calm and lovely. My eye was greedy for the morning's beauty; things I had never seen before seemed wonderful, desirable, and worth investigation. It should be easier, I thought with some satisfaction, for a man not greatly trained in courage, to meet his greatest personal crisis acceptably on a day when sky and sea were not forcing their melancholy upon his attention. But there was an ominous quality in that sunlight, even then, and somewhere over the horizon's edge one felt the autumn storms in ambush.

As we turned the Point the curving ranks of the shore cottages revealed all their sea windows demurely boarded. Plainly no chance boat with inquiring glasses would guess that anything upon the Island was not as its owners would approve. But before we came to the houses we left the beach and, ascending the bluff stairs, struck into the shore bridle-path, and here there began to be signs of that masquerade of which I had been made aware the night before. The streets were nearly as full as before our people deserted them, and the same costumes were grouped in approximately the same gathering-places. There was a tennis match on in the Casino court, and across the links a red-coat was moving leisurely, accom-

panied by a crisp white duck figure. It was very complete, very well done. I stopped in spite of young Devries and his silly revolver and laughed consumedly.

"Gad!" said I, "I wouldn't have missed this for the mint!"

"That's fortunate," he returned. "There's a whole lot more of it, you know."

And then, with a most military fife and drum, a surprising procession turned the corner.

"Who are those?" I asked in surprise. "You didn't get *that* out of our book!"

A large company of boys in khaki were swinging down the street in fine formation to the tune of Yankee Doodle. Not one of them was over eighteen—some not over twelve. Children, all of them with solemn, red-cheeked faces—splendid children, and their eyes were all of that strangeness which had cowed me in Billy Strait's. The strangeness, I think, of the sea.

"There's more than you would like to know about them," said Devries, ambiguously. "However, they are the glorious army of caddies and button boys, the little pages and messengers of all sorts. Too many, eh? That's what they think, too. I'm afraid you'll have to build a few more palaces if *all* the population of Sunny Sea is to find employment." He stopped with me, his eyes following them with a curious expression: amusement, envy—something else. "Damned if I know the answer!" he said, quite to himself, when they had passed.

Devries did not enter the Airley house by the most open way. We skirted about through byways and hedges, and at last went in by the servants' entrance. A man whom I recognized vaguely as one of the club waiters rose up hastily. He appeared to have been expecting us.

"You can't go up just yet," he whispered. "Your father came in half an hour ago, looking as if he couldn't start in too soon to please him. Manson is there, too, and DeSaussure and Prado. I don't see how old Beeson *can* hold out."

"What am I to do with this, then?" Devries indicated me with his pistol. "I'm due up there to help father, you know."

"Oh, run it into the cellar!" said the other glancing at me with a careless eye, in which I read no memory of my large

tips. "Tie him if you want to, but he couldn't get out of a pasteboard hat-box if somebody shut the lid on him."

Yet in this they carried their scorn to too great length, for when I was a boy, before all my ambitions were killed by choking them with butter, there had been one which I had all but carried through when my mirthful and horrified family put a stop to it. So when they mentioned tying me I had to call up my poker face to hide my elation, for I knew, as well as the master magician who had taught me, how to so let myself be tied that no rope could hold me. But I drooped my head in a downcast way and went sighingly to my dungeon, submitting to Devries's hasty tying with the limp air of a man wholly without hope.

He did it rapidly and I thought even in his hurry there was a humane attempt not to draw the cords too tight nor pull my arms into an uncomfortable angle. It was not so, surely, that the old buccaneers, his ancestors, were careful of their victim's comfort.

As I rapidly slipped out of the knots which, thanks to the only useful training I ever had, were no knots at all, I meditated with some wonder on this evidence of the world having fallen on gentler times. Educated and merciful pirates, who put the worm upon the hook as if they loved it! But I began to fear it was none the less a hook.

Overhead there was the dull shuffling of many feet, and now and then a raised voice reached me, but I could not distinguish anything that was said. I started on a tour about my prison trying to find the place where the voices sounded most clearly. Evidently there was great excitement under way, and this gave me hope. For their regard of me seemed so slight at best (or worst) that if they really got to quarrelling I might be forgotten altogether, and then I knew I could handle a small boat well enough to take me out to the track of the incoming steamers.

Hunting closely after the voices, then, I found myself in a bin, as it seemed, of pungent fine ashes, and looking upward distinguished a line of light overhead. I brought an empty box, and standing on it contrived to make out some system of chains and pulleys which I have since learned was Colonel Airley's own device

for letting the ashes out of his great fireplace. The crevice left by the ill-working of this trap now furnished me a space to hear, and by a wonderful neck-breaking distortion I could manage to get a meagre view of the room; a view, at least, of feet—the well-shod feet of my own friends they seemed, yet with a difference.

At the head of the dining-table the stout white canvas appendages that should have been Colonel Airley's own were in the position of standing; all the others at an angle which indicated that their owners were seated. The tan feet of Judge Brinley were there, too, but the enlarged area that gave ease to his gouty steps was now wrinkled and flat. In a general way the foot-gear gathered at that end of the table appeared to be that of elderly men. But at the middle there began a division of more youthful foot-wear, red or variegated hoisery, pumps, and carefully tied bows. It was instructive, too, to note the placid stolidity of that upper elderly half of the table as against the restless shuffling of the other.

The debate was on. The calm and sonorous voice of old Beeson, standing in Colonel Airley's shoes, was concluding as I took my place; I was too late to distinguish anything he said. But as the white ties resumed the position of sitting, the gouty tan ones of Judge Brinley quickly stood, and I heard the voice of old Devries—not the soft "Shampoo, sir?" tone, but one that went better in accord with his face. A clear, harsh voice of great power, whose ancestors had been trained in shouting orders against great sea-winds, the voice of the old buccaneer, red-sashed, with sea-legs well apart standing upon his deck and bellowing against the gale. I seemed to see him, cutlass in fist, engaged in matters of gold and slaughter, and I sought and found a way to draw my legs up among Colonel Airley's pulley chains, so that I could suspend myself in the flue with enough ease to my muscles to last for some time, and, I hoped, with some security from any who might come to seek me.

"Governor Beeson has stated," he began, "that twenty years is not long enough for the magnitude of the experiment we have undertaken. He reminds us also that it was begun with the consent of us all;

and that is true. But there is now a new element to be considered. Beeson and I, who are old, may be content with winter fireside and book as the guerdon of the summer's bitter humiliation; but as to those who are young—have we the right to force our quiet and humble ways upon them? We accepted the fat living which came from the mainland because it seemed to us that our children, feeding upon it with the clean sea-winds of the winters as a digestive, might develop into a race able to go forth into the world and take up the work of the world with a greater capacity than those in whose hands it now lies. It was a great and worthy purpose, and let none be more eager than I to give homage to him who conceived it, and in whose hands the carrying out of it has chiefly lain. But I now speak for those who maintain that our long dissembling has served its purpose, who claim that further servitude will wholly defeat the end toward which we have struggled for so long. From these windows you hear now the fife and drum and the many marching feet of that generation for which we have done and suffered many things. They are children to-day, but to-morrow they will be men. Are these, then, to continue in the service of weaklings from whom we have already gained everything of value which they had? Are we to subject them to the corrupt air which surrounds such potential Neros as the wretch Hatha-way, who now corrupts no more? We accepted these pseudo-owners of our Island as we would have accepted a shoal of fat fish—for our own good. We have thrived upon them, indeed, for we have not only fed ourselves and our children upon their unused books, but we have followed each step in the construction of their great houses. We know how all things here are made. Their owners do not. We are architects, mechanics, electricians in our own right. Our husbandry of their well-supplied larders has given us such leisure from the immediate necessities that we have been able to make researches of our own. But we have now drained them dry as a sucked orange, empty as the shells upon the beach when the birds have fed. Wherefore I submit, with all humility but with firm conviction, there are but two courses open to us: Either this young life for which we have

endured so much must go to the mainland, and there take its chances with the other young life of the race, or—we must *take our Island back!*”

With that amazing sentence he was seated, and there was a long silence. The only comment made by the calm white shoes of old Beeson was the lifting of one foot to cross one knee over the other. It also moved slightly as with negation; so might there be a flicker of motion in the tip of a lion's tail long before he had made up his mind to roar.

Upon the sound and fury of old Devries followed the harsh voice of some man not accustomed to expressing himself in public: a shy man, but terribly in earnest, and the shoes that he stood in were also upon the elders' side of the table.

“I stand with Devries here,” he said. “We want our Island back. And we don't care how we get it. I wonder our grandfathers don't turn in their graves, that I do; but their bones are scattered at the bottoms of all the seas there are, and their souls—able seamen every one—are in a blessed place where no knowledge of their blood's degeneracy can trouble them. Get it back for our children. Give them the moors to run free upon as we did before them. Give them back the ocean and the man's work to their hands that lies in the handling of one poor smack, to say naught of the old whaling-vessels. How does wealth come to be polluting this honest sea air? What did the land lubbers want of this island, anyhow? I say let the money go back to the cities and the half-men it breeds there, or by the Lord, we'll send it all to Davy Jones! We're a nation all by ourselves, you keep saying; well, then, let's declare war and do as other nations do in war—scuttle their ships, while they are in 'em, by thunder, and give it out 'twas a tidal wave did it! We haven't played a part all these years without getting smart enough to put through one more deal. Then the boys out there could go to colleges on the mainland or stay here as they liked, with equal freedom and safety. I expect to be howled down by the humane contingent here, but I tell you the things done in this world that stay once they are done have to be glued together with somebody's blood. You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs, and you can't

make a nation, even in miniature, without cracking the heads of those who stand in your way."

He sat down with a thump and straightway the room was buzzing. I was comforted by the many hisses that greeted the bloodthirsty old pirate, but there were fierce sounds of approval, too, and the feet, the expressive feet that I had been watching—as one watches the emotions of a face, were all flat-soled upon the floor and at alert right angles to the legs they supported.

The next speaker rose from the side where the young men sat, and before he had spoken I recognized the softly padding rubber-soled beach shoes that had brought me to this pass. It was young Devries helping his father.

"I go with Prado," he said, shouting to make himself heard above a din which seemed to make nothing of the usual parliamentary rules. They subsided sufficiently to listen. "We take back the Island any way we can get it. We go to the mainland, too. We go when we want to, and come back when we want to. If it's the younger generation for whom you are anxious, give us freedom! Let us see what the world is like for ourselves. I'm too old to be of those out there"—he probably gesticulated toward the street—"but I'm young enough to want to live my life in the world—not here. You say we are better men than those who order us about. Let us go and prove it on their own ground!"

This was answered by a shout from that side of the table, and I saw that they were all upon their feet again. And then at last I saw old Beeson's legs uncross and he slowly rose.

He began by quoting impressively:

"With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive to finish the work we are in."

He spoke these words solemnly before beginning his reply to those who had been assailing him and his policies. The room was so still that a bit of mortar, dislodged by me, and falling upon the bed of ashes at the cellar-bottom, resounded like an avalanche. But I do not think the telltale sound made an impression upon any ear there. I will not attempt to give that speech in full. A sentence here and there

is all I can recover. To a certain extent, however, I can paraphrase.

He began by reminding them that not any of them there present except himself and Devries had ever had any experience of the world except that which had come to them upon their own peaceful Island. "You have never breathed the air of their cities; you have never seen their poor. I have been among their poor; I have accepted the icy charity of their rich. I have seen their pleasures. I have witnessed—and shared—their great, unnecessary sorrows. Among them there are giants; but also there are dwarfs, whose only weapon is a poison wherewith to defend their incapacity. Most terrible of all, however, is their pity, which preserves and caters to the unfit by every resource that their wonderful inventions have placed at their command, until the whole earth is sick with too much life. Not life of thought and high endeavor such as a man's life should be, but life that is little more than motion—foul, like maggots in a dead fish resolving into lower forms. And their law: merciful law, designed to shelter the new life beginning in the wilderness, as the fire-weed, the wild-cherry, and the birch protect the young growth of spruce that is eventually to become a forest, this law has so ramified, so spread its branches, that it has become a thing apart from the people, existing by itself and for itself; not part of their blood and sinew, subservient to their need, but feeding upon them—a cancerous growth. Should I not know?"

An impressive pause followed that question. That "I" seemed to hold a deeper meaning than appeared upon the surface. Who was he, then, that, knowing so much of the great nation, he had abandoned it to pour himself out for this toy replica of one?

"I, too, once thought that one should be in the world and of it to be wholly a man. And indeed, I passed for one—even over there."

He paused again, and there was a heavy answering silence. Then he resumed:

"It was as I was beginning to question my own usefulness that there came the knowledge of how this Island, where I had lived a wholesome boyhood, and where, as I seemed to remember, my soul had been made clean daily by the

sea and its wind—this Island, I learned, was to pass into skillless and selfish hands, the same hands whose touch, I had begun to surmise, was responsible for the blight which I everywhere encountered in that other country—a blight which caused the fabric of great works to crumble to nothing under the fingers of those who might have wrought wonderfully. I returned, as you know, remembering my own people, and thinking that here a man's work among men might count. . . ."

His voice shook. "An Odysseus to his Ithaca," he muttered thickly, then slowly resuming:

"You know what we have done together. That sound of young marching feet along our streets to-day. . . . *Those* are the feet of a great hope! Let none stay them! They are the sons of the sea, but they have also been reared upon the richest food of civilization. And they have thriven—as that great young nation once thrived. But they are not ready. If we let them go now they will be overcome by the same confusion that has overtaken that multitude upon the mainland. They would sicken in that air as in the poisonous exhalations of a marsh. But if we can keep them until their full manhood . . . *then* they can go out victorious. Then shall the sick Amfortas look upon the spear. Then shall Rome die again, but not with barbarous tribes upon her throat. Gently and honorably, the old order changing, 'lest one good custom should corrupt the world.'

"Let them then go in the strength of manhood, and they will lead a bewildered people. Let them, and you in their behalf, curb their impatience but a few more winters, endure bondage but a few more summers. I have much to teach you still, and that which I have planned for you lies farther on . . . much farther, yet I swear it is no empty vision nor old man's dream of Paradise. Remember that tale of a wilderness journey which lasted forty years. Shall we then cease our quest at twenty? I, who have humbly tried to be your Moses, I am not yet ready to lay down my rod of office. But let me see so much of accomplishment as that we shall be sending forth not babes to be slaughtered, but men to conquer,

and I shall lay my authority at your feet. Until then," his voice rang out with military sharpness, "until then I will protect you against yourselves. Peacefully if I can, but not one life, nor two, nor two hundred shall stand between me and the accomplishment of that thing for which I have striven."

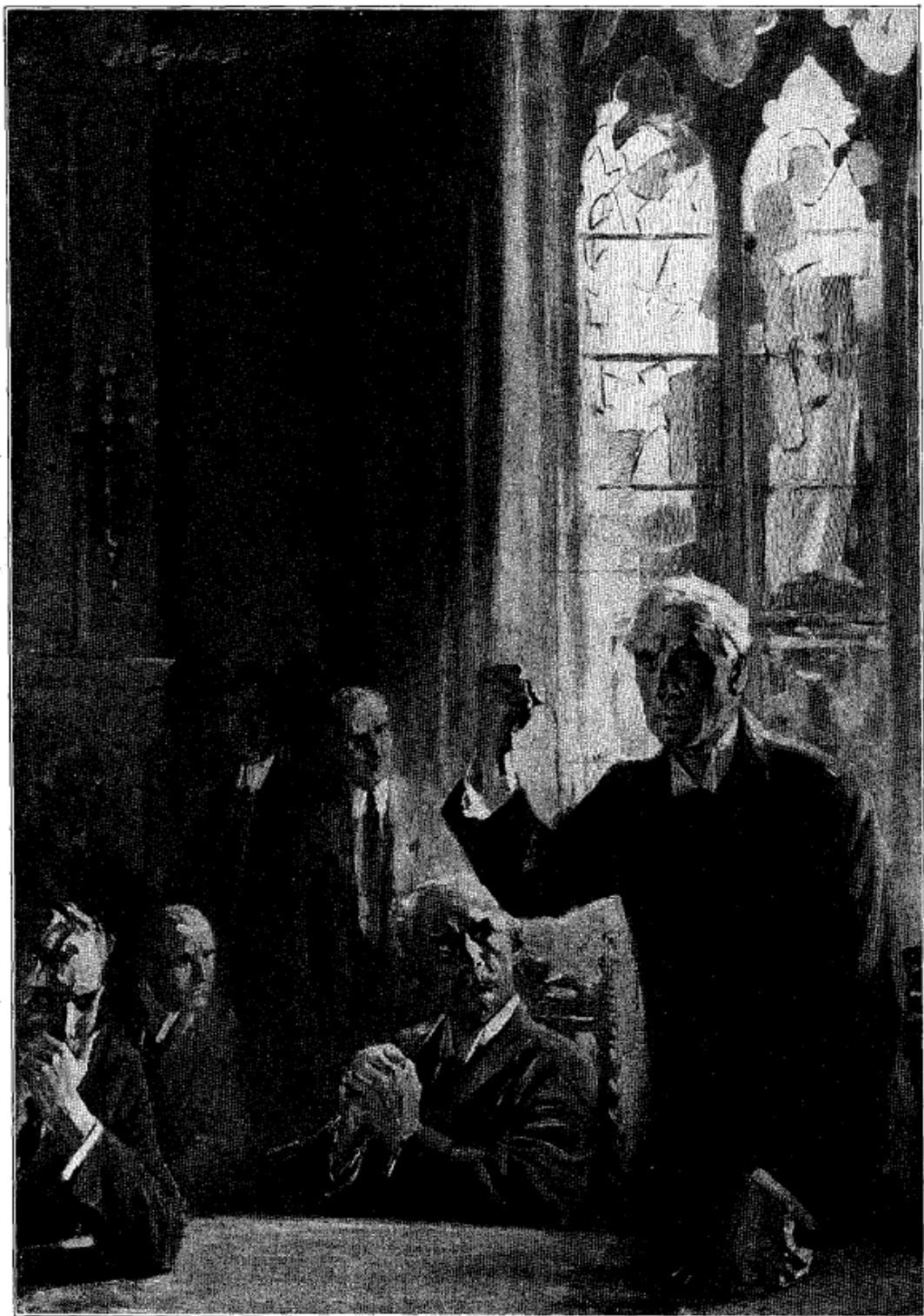
He had won. His little ship of state had ridden out the tempest in a teapot. A vote was taken and they agreed quietly enough to go on for at least another year without change in their peculiar form of rarefied brigandage.

And then . . . they began to talk about me. Great orators they were! I suppose they had been making Demostheneses of themselves through the winter evenings of twenty years, instead of swapping lies on cracker-boxes as their forebears had done. It was Billy Strait who presented my case. I did not at first recognize the character he gave me, and yet . . . I have been meeker since that day.

"It is not," said he in a kind and worried voice, "as in the case of Hathaway, that the intruder is pre-eminently one who should be weeded out of any community. This man is of a cleanly, quiet, studious type, practising virtues, negative as they are, in an environment so foreign to them that they take on an active value. He devotes, I understand, fully half of his great income to those charities which he is persuaded are most effective. He has courage, too, of a sort. I admit that I, for one, if his removal should be deemed necessary, should be saddened by a heavy misgiving as to our ultimate success.

"We are sprung, not so many generations ago, from a race of violent men, shedders of innocent blood. Were this man to die, our young men would hear whispers of it, however secret we might be, and I fear the knowledge would make a crevice for the advantage of an ancestry of evil-doers, who would rush in from that limbo which holds them now, and we should find that with all our care we had but bred a race of wolves.

"I admit the difficulty. That our careful structure should be at the mercy of a careless tongue is wrong, . . . yet . . . this man . . . I think I could trust him. It is not impossible that he might join us . . . with his wealth thrown upon our side. . . ."



Drawn by Howard Giles.

His voice rang out with military sharpness, "until then I will protect you against yourselves."—Page 704.

He was interrupted by a laugh.

"He wants Watkins to subsidize us"; it was the younger Devries, I think. "Talk about our ancestors! Captain Kidd himself would hardly have angled for a ransom of that size. You're coming on, Billy!"

"We-ell," Billy defended himself with a kind of rueful good humor, "he might at least have his choice. Think how bully it would be for us to be able to come out in the open. . . ."

Then Beeson's grave voice broke in:

"Bring him up."

There was a stir of feet in obedience. I swung myself lightly down, not being able to climb higher, and returned to my old place in the bin. I had no sooner simulated my bonds and sleep than the lights flashed up throughout the cellar. I heard many feet on the stairs, and as I looked up into the faces of men to whose service I had been accustomed for years, I felt the same amazement that must fill the breast of a fine pig that has been catered to and petted and admired for a long and satisfying summer until it must think—if there is such a process as thought in that thick skull—that it surely is of the fit and admirable, loved of its Maker, destined to special care both heavenly and terrestrial for many happy days. And then the day of the knife . . . *ultima necat* . . . the rest is pork!

"Hello, boys!" I said with a grin. These were men neither young nor old, but of my own age, the doubtful thirties. And I had to admit, now that I really saw them for the first time, that there was a height and breadth to them, a clearness of eye, a grace and sureness of carriage, that, in fine, they were better men than I, so I looked up at them with what courage I might in my rôle of useful pork and said, "Hello, boys!" with humility and respect.

They did not observe that my bonds were no bonds at all, but carefully undid me knot by knot and kindly rubbed my supposedly stiff ankles and wrists, but to me as an individual they paid as little attention as I had been wont to accord them when in livery they had made a discreet part of the room's furniture. They talked among themselves as I

and my friends had been wont to talk before them, but I walked among them solitary to my judgment before Old Beeson.

In my dungeon I had not known of the great autumn storm that had blown in as the fog blew out. Now as I entered the great dining-room I was aware of rain against the windows; the room was dark, and the beating of the surf was plain. The faces turned toward me were vague in the storm's twilight and pale. Beeson sat with his back to the leaded window, and as I stood silently before him something within me, like the jarring of a shifting mechanism, seemed to place me back somewhere in obsolete centuries, a frightened vassal before his lord. This was not the first time that a sea-wind had blown past leaded Gothic windows while Beeson and I faced each other across a table, he seated and I standing.

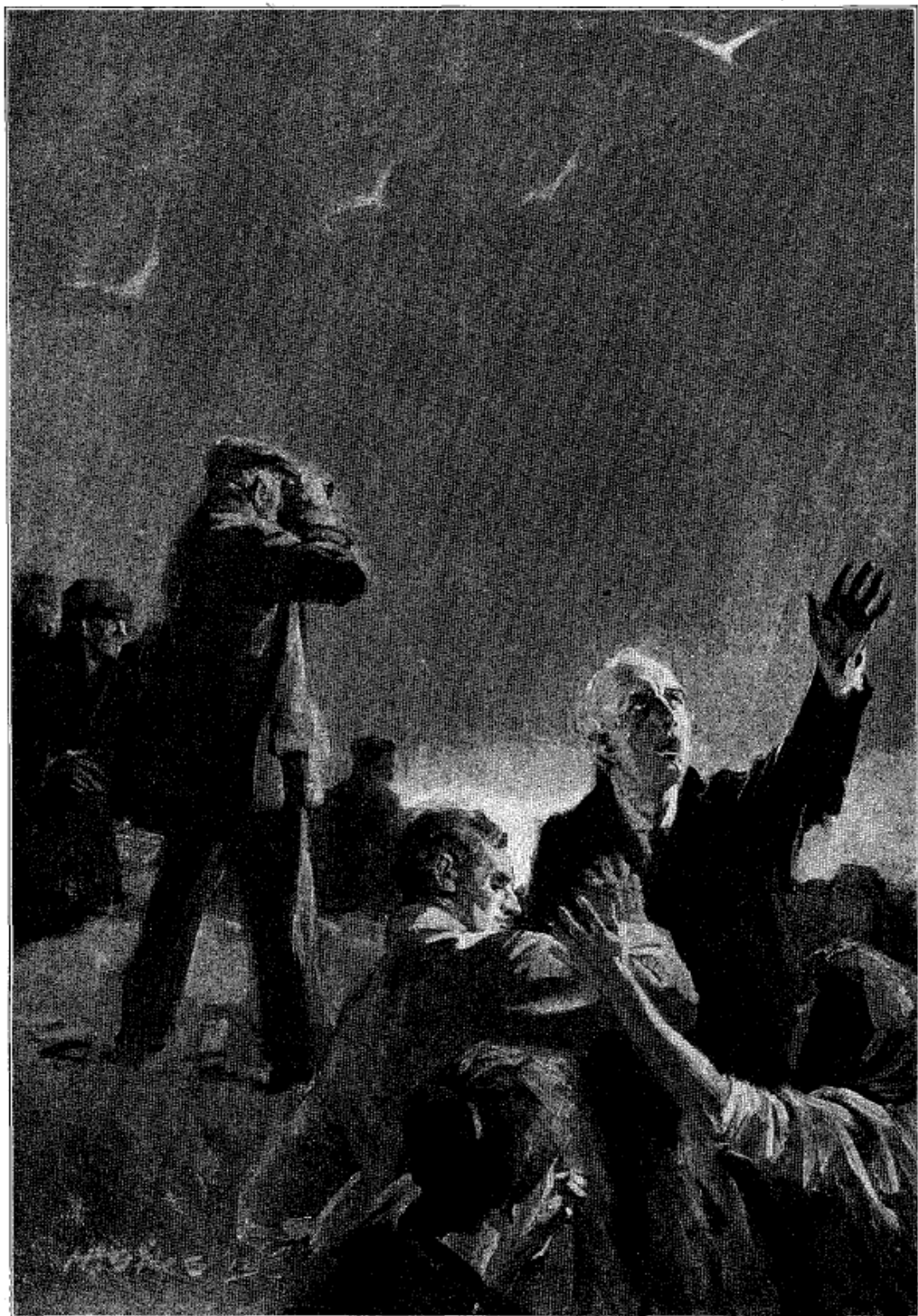
And then, at the moment, I think, that he was opening his lips . . . I shall never know whether he intended life or death for me, there sounded the screaming of women, . . . distant at first, then hurrying nearer like the wind itself. Beeson forgot me and turned toward the door as did all the rest. It was flung inward as by the wind's violence, and we saw a woman with streaming gray hair, her arms raised above her head, her mouth opening and shutting voicelessly; then she began to scream curses, while the space behind her filled with a crowd of other women, all dishevelled and wailing. From somewhere among them little Polly darted in and, throwing her arms about her father's neck, whispered in his ear. He rose and put her aside, turning to the men with sharp orders to get out the boats, but at this the women broke into dreadful laughter.

"Boats! Do you think they didn't think of that? Those they have not taken will never sail again."

Devries muttered:

"And with no knowledge of the sea! The Rip will have them by now."

I found myself borne forward by the rush of men to the beach and with the others stood upon a bluff straining my eyes against a veil of gray rain which now and again was thrust aside by the wind so that something of the sea was murkily vis-



Drawn by Howard Giles.

"They . . . shall make port in safety. The sea could not . . . it could not . . . lives of such value."—Page 703.

ible. And so even I had one glimpse of a little fleet of fishing-boats stepping bravely out to sea in all that weather.

Some one took my arm and leaned upon it; I turned to see Old Beeson. I do not think he knew me. His lips were moving with words. Leaning close, I distinguished out of the mutter, . . . "the impatience of youth. I had not sufficiently reckoned with it, . . . nor with its indifference toward those who . . . have borne the agony. They planned for themselves. While we were planning for them, they planned for themselves."

Devries from behind his binoculars interrupted with a roar of savage approval: "Well handled! Able seamen every one!"

At that Beeson drew himself erect and turned to the frantic women a face as bloodless as the foam:

"They . . . shall make port in safety. The sea could not . . . it could not . . . lives of such value . . ."

He turned, staggered, and fell. Polly threw herself upon him with wild tears, but Billy Strait, having felt for the heart and found it silent, spread a handkerchief over the face and drew Polly's head to his shoulder.

As for me, I might have been a bit of driftwood for all the attention they paid me, until finally young Wireless, having fairly tripped over me, recognized me with an abstracted stare and said civilly enough: "You'll be wanting to send a message. I'll attend to it directly, sir."

It was plain enough that with the death of Beeson and the children's departure, the tiny nation's mainspring was broken. I doubted that its machinery would ever be set in motion again.

Yet if the boats ever reached the mainland—not that any shipping news has ever reported such an arrival . . . but somehow, I think with Old Beeson that the sea itself would turn aside from the destruction of *that* Argosy.

